

Better to have Loved and Lost

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## Better to have Loved and Lost

Chakotay's day starts off as one of the best days he has experienced in over a decade. The Voyager crew has crippled the Borg, traversed 30,000 lightyears, and welcomed a new crewmember â€“ all before lunch.

As he stands beside Seven, he soaks up the elation seeping from every deck of Voyager and adds his to the mix. That joy is shattered when Kathryn turns to the upper deck and says, "Mister Chakotay, the helm."

To the rest of the bridge crew, it may seem respectful. One captain to another. But to Chakotay, it screams formality and protocol. It doesn't speak of the easy familiarity they have shared for seven years.

Once in orbit of Earth, Kathryn is swept off to answer hails and write reports, and Chakotay is left to wonder why Kathryn seemed so distant. By 13:00, Chakotay is about to burst. He decides to use his lunch time to swing by Kathryn's quarters.

Chakotay's finger has barely pressed the chime when he hears Kathryn call for entrance.

"Hello, Commander. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No. I just wanted to offer my congratulations. You did it Kathryn."

"We all did. The entire crew got us home."

"But your leadership kept us faithful. Your determination is the

reason we made it back."

Chakotay sees a strange look pass across Kathryn's face, but it's gone before he can analyze it.

"Thank you, Commander. I'm just glad to see Earth again."

"I know. It's all you've talked about for seven years."

Again the look is in Kathryn's eyes, but this time it isn't as fleeting. He recognizes it as the hurt it is. His barb was meant to be funny not hurtful. He prepares to apologize until Kathryn cuts him off.

"Yes. It is. It's all I could focus on for seven years. I had to use everything I had to make it home. I would've gotten out and pushed if it would've helped."

"I don't know another captain who could've made it home so quickly."

"I cheated, though. I came back and changed the rules. For all the things I didn't like about the Admiral, her love for this crew is something I understand."

"I don't think anyone onboard is too upset about the Admiral's assistance. Besides, if it wasn't meant to happen like this, don't you think the time police would've corrected her interference."

"I've been thinking about that. It's given me a terrible headache."

At Kathryn's smile, Chakotay responds with a dimpled smile of his own.

"Now you'll get as much time to rest as you can. Some time alone."

"Alone. Hmm. What a novel idea."

Chakotay can tell Kathryn knows her joke falls flat the moment she says it, but he can't figure out why she's in such a bad mood. Unlessâ€¦

"You haven't received any bad news from Starfleet, have you?"

"No. Everything we hoped for has already been approved. Back pay, no jail time, the doctor is his own person, and Seven and Icheb have been accepted."

"Where's Icheb going?"

Looking at Kathryn, Chakotay can't believe that he has somehow irked her again. He can't figure out her mood today.

"I'm in the process of adopting him. He's almost a legal adult under Federation Law, but as of now, he needs a legal guardian in order to apply for Federation Citizenship. I thought this way he would feel like it's more permanent. I love him like I would love my own child

anyway. If Seven wasn't of age and already a Federation Citizen, I would've done the same for her. Besides Kes, she's the closest I've ever had to a daughter or probably ever will."

"I always considered her your protÃ©gÃ©. Daughter's a bit of a stretch."

Chakotay's mind won't process the idea of Seven being Kathryn's daughter. If it would, he would be repulsed.

"I taught her almost everything she knows about being a human being. I taught her manners, morals, and how to make tough choices. She may have been potty trained, able to walk, and extremely intellectual, but she came to us as little more than a child. I feel a protectiveness over her that I have seen in my own mother."

"I don't see it. She's a beautiful woman. She's smarter than anyone I've ever met and much more caring than people give her credit for."

"You'd be in that last category if we had taken a poll six months ago."

Kathryn's eyes widen, and Chakotay can tell she didn't mean to say that aloud.

"Probably, but I've gotten a chance to know her since then. And I have changed my opinion."

"You didn't get a chance to know her. The chance was always there. You just never took it before. We have a community of less than 150 people. Until six months ago, I bet she's one of the only, if not the only, crewmember you didn't try to get to know."

Chakotay is taken aback by Kathryn's cutting remarks.

"What's wrong with you Kathryn?"

"Nothing."

"Obviously not nothing. You're acting like something is seriously wrong, and I want to know what."

"You're right. I'm sorry. I'm just tired. I haven't slept well this past week."

Looking at her more thoroughly, Chakotay notices the fatigue around her eyes and mouth.

"I understand. I know you're tired, but I really would like your blessing Kathryn. You mean a lot to me, and I want to know that you're happy for me."

Kathryn stands absolutely still for a quiet moment before adamantly shaking her head.

"I can't do that Chakotay."

"You can't or won't? What, am I not good enough for your 'daughter'?"

"It's not that. I just don't want anyone to get hurt."

"Oh that's rich."

"It's not rich. It's the truth. I don't want to see either of you hurt, and I feel like that's the only outcome of this arrangement."

"It's not an arrangement. Seven means a lot to me, and I thought as your friend, you would want to be happy for me."

"I do."

"What then? Are you jealous?"

Based on Kathryn's steely eyes, Chakotay knows he hit it right on the button.

"You are. You can't stand to see me happy. You haven't been able to make a relationship work, so you can't stand to see me happy since you aren't."

"That's uncalled for Commander."

"Don't 'Commander' me, Kathryn. We're home, and this is personal."

Kathryn's jaw tightens uncomfortably.

"You said you did this for love and that Seven is like a daughter to you, but you are wrong on both accounts. I don't know how or why, but I bet the Admiral's reasons somehow boil down to manipulations and selfishness. She would've said or done anything to get us to do what she wanted."

"That's not true. She did it to bring her crew home. She did it to save her family."

"Seven told me the Admiral said she was going to die. Let me guess, that convinced you to alter your opinion about using the transwarp hub because you love Seven so much. You don't know what love is Kathryn. And Seven isn't your daughter. You don't have a daughter. And you were too busy captaining Voyager to consider us family."

"Get out Chakotay."

"No. I stood by you for seven years. I thought you cared about me, cared about your crew, but you never did. You were just a shell of a woman who was so determined to get home that she couldn't stand to care about anything else."

Kathryn finally meets the eyes that have been drilling into her throughout the tirade and breaks down. Great sobs are pulled from her body too quickly to form any defense. Chakotay looks on repulsed.

"You can't manipulate me anymore Kathryn. Those fake tears don't mean anything to me."

Kathryn is getting progressively more worked up, but Chakotay's last whispered words put the nails in her coffin.

"I can't believe I wasted so much time loving a woman like you."

Leaving all her dignity in tatters at Chakotay's feet, Kathryn runs from her quarters.

For long minutes after she leaves, Chakotay looks around Kathryn's quarters from where he stands. The argument is flashing through his head repeatedly. Until this moment, he had never thought of Kathryn as a coward. But as soon as he gives her a piece of his mind, she uses her crocodile tears, tucks her tail, and runs away. He would never have expected something like that from the great Captain Kathryn Janeway.

Chakotay huffs a breath and then exits the quarters with a look of disgust.

Chakotay enters his quarters only seconds before he hears his door chime.

Taking a deep breath he bids entrance.

"Can I come in for a moment?"

"Sure Paris."

"I just wanted to ask you something. Do you know why the Captain is behaving like she is?"

"She's not behaving any differently than she's always behaved." Chakotay's bad mood from his confrontation is still fueling his responses. Tom is shocked by the venom in Chakotay's voice.

"Yes. She is. If I didn't know how excited she is to be back on Earth, I would think she was depressed."

"Why would she be depressed? She just got everything she's been working for. Seven years of devotion paid off."

"I know, but I also know Kathryn Janeway. I've seen her depressed before â€“ twice actually, and neither time was pretty. The void was horrible, but I saw a look on her face today that I haven't seen since she lost her fiancÃ©."

"I don't remember her being depressed about Mark."

"No, her first fiancÃ©. Justin."

Chakotay stands there looking confused for a moment. His lack of understanding shocks Tom to his core. He would've thought there were no secrets between the command team.

"You know about her father's accident?" Chakotay nods, not understanding the connection between the two.

"The Terra Nova crashed with three occupants: Edward Janeway, Justin

Tighe, and the Captain. The Captain was the only survivor. She lost her father and her fiancÃ©."

Chakotay's confusion now morphs into self-disgust and hatred. He can't help but to think of his last conversation with Kathryn. Knowing what he knows now, he can understand why his words had caused the immovable Kathryn Janeway to flee from her own personal space. Only moments ago, he was proud that he had stood up for himself. But this one piece of information changes everything. How dare he tell her she didn't care about any of them and that she didn't understand love. She did understand love. Probably better than he ever had.

"She didn't tell you?" Tom's question brings Chakotay out of his reverie enough to shake his head.

"Yeah. It was on Tau Ceti Prime. She had enough power to transport one of them, but she tried to save them both. By the time she realized she couldn't, it was too late to save either one."

With every word, Chakotay thinks the lancing pain can't get worse, only to be proven wrong over and over.

"My dad was her sponsor, so I knew her when I was growing up. Also, my dad and Edward were really good friends. It destroyed a lot of people when the Terra Nova crashed. The Captain almost got discharged from Starfleet because the counselors considered her unstable. It took her six months to get back on track, but I don't know if she ever fully recovered."

The look on Tom's face is so full of empathy that Chakotay can't help but be glad knowing that Kathryn had someone on board who knew her biggest secrets.

"Why didn't she tell me?" Chakotay realizes the question is self-indulgent, but he has to know.

"You can't know how bad it was back then. I visited her a couple weeks after with my dad, and she was nothing but a body that was waiting for the end to come. Her dad and Justin were her whole world, and they were lost at her hand. You know she has a penchant for feeling guilty even when it isn't her fault. But she could've saved one of them. She felt bad that she didn't save her father because he gave her life and helped her grow. She felt bad because she didn't save Justin after he saved her from the Cardassians. Everyone lost."

Tom pauses to gain control over his emotions, but Chakotay can tell how much it's costing him to share something so private and sacred to Kathryn, even if it is to help her.

"She and my dad were prisoners for 73 days. They had been separated the first day, and the guards dealt punishment to them. The only time they were near each other was when the guards wanted them to witness the other's torture. Then one day, Justin comes in like her knight in shining armor. My dad said he had never seen someone as scared as Kathryn was the day of her rescue, and Justin was there to help her pick up the pieces."

Kathryn had told Chakotay about her Cardassian incarceration early on

in the journey in order to show her sympathy to the Maquis cause, but she had never told him that she'd been a prisoner for 73 days. When she talked to him, she made it seem relatively slight, but Chakotay knew what those prisons were like. And 73 days was a long time to become acquainted with Cardassian guards and their forms of punishment.

"She thought he'd always be thereâ€¦ Then one day she looked around, and he was gone."

Chakotay feels like he's going to throw up. How many times did he think of the word 'always' when he thought of his relationship with Kathryn? He had told her he'd always be there for her, but when she looked around the bridge when they arrived in the Alpha quadrant, where was he? Not beside her. No, he was beside Seven. He was beside a girl Kathryn considers a daughter.

"I hated to tell you since the Captain hadn't, but I'm really worried about her. I don't want her to go back to Gretchen and Phoebe like this. They've dealt with it once. It isn't fair for them to do it again â€" not when they are just getting her back."

"You're right, Tom. I'll go talk to her."

Tom nods before exiting Chakotay's quarters.

As soon as the doors close, Chakotay sinks to the ground with an anguished groan. He had no clue how much his words would hurt Kathryn, but that didn't matter. Those words had been said out of anger. He had said them to hurt her; he just didn't realize how effective they would be.

Pulling himself out of his thoughts, Chakotay stands up and heads next door. After buzzing three times for entrance, Chakotay considers using his override codes. That thought dissipates when he sees an image in his mind of Kathryn with tears pouring down her face as she escaped her quarters earlier. It's an image that will haunt him forever.

Chakotay then considers that she might not be in her quarters. They do have a lot of work to complete before they disembark.

"Computer, where is Captain Janeway?"

"\_Captain Janeway is not on board.\_"

Chakotay feels a sense of panic set in. The Kathryn he knows would never willingly leave Voyager until her entire crew was safely on Earth. 'But,' thinks Chakotay, 'that's exactly the problem. I don't know Kathryn, at least not as well as I thought I did.'

"Computer, when did she leave?"

"\_Captain Janeway transported from Voyager at 13:48.\_"

That was less than 15 minutes after their heated argument.

"Dammit."

"\_Please restate â€“ "

"Stop."

Chakotay immediately heads to his office to try and get ahold of someone who might know something. In the turbolift, he decides to make a quick stop at the bridge before heading towards his comm.

Upon exiting on the bridge, he sees Tuvok's face in the closest thing to a scowl he has seen on a Vulcan in his entire life.

"I assume you are here to ask about the Captain, Commander."

Chakotay should've known Tuvok would be alerted if anyone asked about Kathryn's whereabouts.

"Yes I have. As first officer, I feel I should've been informed of the Captain's departure."

"You would've been had the reason fallen under the purview of ship's business. Seeing as it was personal in nature, it was not logical to inform you."

"Personal?"

Tuvok gives a slight nod and raises his eyebrow.

"Indeed. She was rather distraught. I do not know the content of the private discussion had between her and Admiral Paris, but he granted her request to beam off the ship."

"Do you know where she went?"

"Yes. However, I was told not to inform anyone of her whereabouts. Unless I believe someone to be in danger, I agree with her logic behind the secrecy."

Chakotay is disgusted by the word logic. If he hears it one more timeâ€¦ Not that he will. He's not going to be talking to Tuvok anymore since he'll never tell where Kathryn transported.

"Thank you, Commander. I understand."

Chakotay walks off the bridge and considers an aimless stroll before deciding on the mess hall. An aimless stroll is just a reminder of Kathryn. Not that the mess hall isn't. In all honesty, not a centimeter of Voyager is Kathryn free.

He enters the mess hall to find quite a portion of the crew gathered. There is excited chatter until they turn en masse to see who entered. Upon seeing him, the room becomes filled with a silence full of anger, sadness, and resentment. In almost seven years, he has never felt this from the crew.

He realizes after a few seconds they can't know about his argument with Kathryn, so he doesn't understand their ire. Shaking his head he begins walking toward the replicator. He pauses halfway between the door and the replicator when it dawns on him: Seven. They are upset

that he didn't wait on Kathryn even though there was nothing there to wait on.

For half a second, he feels rage against his crewmembers, his family, for how they are treating him. Then his mind conjures up images of Kathryn with a tear soaked face, and he realizes that the crew's treatment of him is downright civil in comparison.

Chakotay pivots and walks out the door and immediately back to his quarters.

He's been sitting on his couch for Spirits know how long, but he can't make himself do anything else.

Being pulled from the maelstrom of his thoughts, he hears the chime ring.

"Come."

"Chakotay. You missed our dinner and didn't respond to hails. What is wrong?"

"What isn't?" Chakotay mumbles forgetting about Borg enhanced hearing.

"Many things are considered to be right. We are back in the Alpha Quadrant. Starfleet is not pressing charges on the former Maquis or the former Equinox crew, and the Captain has been informed she won't be court martialed."

"You're right, Seven."

"However, I see your point. Upon reaching Earth, many crewmembers have been acting more hostile towards me than usual. At first, I believed it was nerves, but upon review I have concluded it is me specifically they feel animosity towards."

For the first time since Seven asked him out, Chakotay can't help but think about how mechanical her speech is.

"It isn't just you, Seven. They believe that you and I entered into this relationship prematurely. Most of the crew believed I would end up with the Captain when the journey was over. Their long held fantasies are fueling their bad spirits. Nothing else."

For someone who recently remembered how annoying Seven is, Chakotay can't help but try to make the relationship work. Most of his other relationships have gone so south lately.

"I knew of their beliefs. The Captain's admiration of you was the reason I believed you to be my greatest match. As the closest thing I have to a mother, her opinion of my choice in mate is important to me."

Chakotay barely stifles a groan before deciding he no longer wants his brain and mouth to discuss matters before putting words into the universe.

"I can't do this anymore."

"Excuse me?"

"I can't do this anymore." Chakotay repeats whilst gesturing wildly between them. "Us. It's wrong. Earlier Kathryn said something about you being like a daughter to her. Now you are telling me she's like your mother. No. I can't."

"I fail to understand, Comm." Chakotay. You have said she is your best friend. Is her approval not of paramount importance to you? She loves you, and she loves me."

"And I love her."

Those four words don't take someone who is a master at understanding humanity to figure out. Chakotay loves Kathryn. He's in love with her.

"I understand, Commander. I wish you well. I know you will do well together."

"I doubt it."

"I do not. I have studied you both. You two were involved in most of my return to humanity. You are caring of the Captain's feelings and would never knowingly hurt her. For seven years, you have been her biggest support. I assumed the love between you two was that of friends, but now I can see how I was mistaken. Good night, Commander."

Before he knows what is happening, Seven is gone, and he's alone in his quarters.

Yet again, he is confronted with words that rip him to shreds. Seven believes he would never knowingly hurt Kathryn, but it was only six hours ago when he had done just that.

He has no clue how to make this right.

"Computer, inform me whenever Captain Janeway is onboard Voyager."

"\_Acknowledged.\_"

For hours Chakotay sits on his couch reliving years of memories starring Kathryn. He thinks of her gentleness, caring, and support throughout the years. Chakotay had fallen in love with this woman almost immediately. She had given him a peace he had never known.

\_I can't believe I wasted so much time loving a woman like you.\_

He can't believe he said those words. Loving Kathryn was easy. The only hardship in his love life he had faced when it came to Kathryn was never being able to be open about his love.

That thought brings Chakotay to New Earth. They had shared something special there. The last few days, before Tuvok came back, they were nearly inseparable. Chakotay remembers Kathryn's passion, the look of love in her eyes, and a deep-seated fear that he hadn't understood at the time.

Now he knows. Kathryn was scared of loving him. She was scared she would lose him if she let herself love him.

On New Earth, it was only two days after she verbalized her love that Tuvok came for them, and they lost each other.

Now, in the moments they should triumph together, Chakotay condemns her and sends her to the hell she was always so scared of.

\_The time is o six hundred. The time is o six hundred.\_

"Reset for 24 hours."

Chakotay's words come from habit, nothing else. The night that just passed in misery for Chakotay is the crew's last one aboard Voyager.

Chakotay continues his morning routine from muscle memory. He doesn't remember the pulses of the sonic shower or what his breakfast tastes like. He is efficient and uncaring.

By 07:00, Chakotay is on the bridge going about his duties. Most of his work consists of reading over section reports and finalizing landing procedure. Kathryn had been a stickler for paperwork, so the crew was caught up when they made their way through the hub.

Now it's just trivial things that aren't important enough to keep his mind off yesterday.

An hour after he came to the bridge, B'Elanna arrives carrying a tightly wrapped bundle.

"Chakotay, I was expecting a visit yesterday. When you didn't come, I decided to bring your niece to you."

When B'Elanna reaches Chakotay, she softly hands the bundle over.

"Meet Miral Kathryn Paris. We decided to name her after two of the strongest women we know."

"She's beautiful B'E. Doesn't look like Tom at all."

"I think she's a spitting image of me, but her lungs make me think she has her mother's temperament." Tom says from the turbolift.

When he reaches the trio, he takes his daughter from Chakotay's arms. Chakotay looks at the little family and aches. This is his dream. The woman he loves, a baby in his arms, and the world at his feet.

He realizes how important Kathryn was in getting Tom and B'Elanna together. More than just having them onboard. She was constantly getting them to work together. She also tempered them both. From Tom's wild youth, and B'Elanna's Klingon short sidedness to what they are now is in large part due to Kathryn's guidance.

"When the Captain came to Sickbay yesterday, you should've seen the look on her face when we told her Miral's full name."

"She visited yesterday?"

"Yeah. She snuck away from her paperwork for a few minutes on her way from her ready room to her quarters."

"Yeah, Chakotay. She was a natural when it came to Miral. When she entered, Miral was crying, but two seconds in her arms and it was over. Maybe she was scared of brig time."

B'Elanna's humor would've been funny to Chakotay on any other day.

"She would make a great mother." Chakotay replies.

"She already is a great mother to most of this crew, but I know what you mean. She'd be great with a baby."

Years ago, Kathryn had said something to Chakotay about the crew being a family, but he had never realized how deep some of the connections were. Most of the crew, especially the younger ones, spent their journey looking to Kathryn as a surrogate mother.

"Well, we'd better get Miral back to our room to get a nap. She has four grandparents to meet later today."

Later todayâ€œ! Tom is scheduled to land on the grounds of the Presidio at 12:00. That gives him less than four hours to sulk before he has to get it together for appearance's sake.

Captain Janeway is back aboard Voyager.\_

Checking his console, Chakotay sees that it's 10:18.

"Where is Captain Janeway?"

"Captain Janeway is in her quarters.\_"

"Status of Captain Janeway?"

"Captain Janeway has put up a level ten do not disturb. She is awake and alert.\_"

'So much for making amends.' Chakotay thinks sadly. Level 10 means she either has a private meeting or a secured comm call. Or, she wants everyone to think she doesâ€œ!

Chakotay is the only crewman besides Tuvok who wasn't led to believe that Kathryn's disappearance yesterday was Starfleet related. When the crew wanted her to join their reveling, they were informed of Janeway's absence from Voyager. A quick and misdirecting word from Tuvok appeased the crew.

"Commander Chakotay please come to my ready room."

Chakotay hadn't expected to hear that voice. Glancing again at the chronometer he sees he only has an hour before they leave Voyager.

Entering the ready room, Chakotay isn't prepared for the sight before him. Kathryn appears to have aged ten years overnight. She looks bone weary and sadder than a human should be able to look.

"Yes, Captain?"

"I wanted you to go over the debarkation schedule I am about to send to the crew."

Reading quickly through the lower ranks, Chakotay's heart is in his throat when he sees the Senior Staff. After the rest of the crew is set to leave, the senior procession begins with Tom, B'Elanna and Miral.

After they exit, the Doctor and Harry are set to go.

Following that are Seven and Chakotay.

Last but not least is the Captain with Icheb and Tuvok.

"I would like the press to see me with Icheb from the very beginning. Since he is the only member of his species in this quadrant, I want to make it as easy as I can for him."

"I see."

"Alright Commander, dismissed."

"Captain. Kathrynâ€| "

"I said dismissed Commander."

Chakotay gets tears in his eyes, tucks his tail between his legs, and runs away.

By 11:45 the entirety of the crew has read the debarkation manifest, and there is a steady build of disappointment amongst the decks.

For years, Chakotay stood beside Kathryn on the bridge, at planetary events, and at Voyager parties. For most of the crew, the fact that Chakotay won't be by her side when they reach Earth brings the realization that their journey is over.

"Senior officers to the bridge. We are to begin landing procedures." Janeway's voice echoes through the comm system.

Within two minutes, the bridge is filled with the people Janeway knows best. Her senior staff is present as well as Miral and Icheb.

"Tom. The helm is yours."

"We're being hailed Captain." Harry says with more enthusiasm than he has ever presented.

"On screen."

"Captain Janeway. I'd like to welcome your crew home."

"Thank you, Mr. President."

"You're clear to land Voyager."

"Understood. Janeway out."

The screen is cut. For long seconds, Kathryn looks around the bridge, Captain's mask firmly in place.

"Harry open a channel to the rest of the ship." Harry nods when the channel is open. "This is Captain Janeway. We have just been given clearance to land on Earth. We're home. Before we land, I want to give a heartfelt thank you to you all. You were an amazing crew, the best a captain has ever had. Over the course of seven years, you became my family. For many of us, it will be hard to leave the safety and security of the family we have made aboard Voyager. I want to tell you all that my doors are always open. I love you like brothers, sisters, and sometimes even children. Welcome home everyone."

Chakotay meets Kathryn's eyes after she finishes speaking and sees nothing. No love, no fear, no Kathryn. She briefly shakes her head telling him he wasn't included in the invitation, and it breaks his heart. Turning her head away, she's all captain.

"Code blue. Tom, take us home."

The landing and debarkation run smoothly. The crew is led to their families. The emotional reunions remind Chakotay what they had been fighting for. Seeing Harry and Naomi reunite with parents. Seeing Ayala and Tuvok reunite with children.

For most people, the sweetest reunion was Janeway's. Janeway never let go of Icheb's hand. Throughout the encompassing hug her mother and sister put her in. At the end of which, she pulls Icheb forward and introduces him.

"Momma, Phoebe, this is my son, Icheb."

"Hi sweetheart. I'm your grandma, Gretchen. And this is Phoebe. Her role will be perpetual thorn in your side."

"I've never had a grandma before."

Those simple words seem to break Gretchen's heart. She hauls him into her arms and whispers words of love to him.

The onlookers are shocked by the intensity of emotion on their Captain's face. In almost seven years, she has never shown anywhere near that level of emotions.

Icheb is also failing to hide emotions. Kathryn is the first loving parent he has ever known. Gretchen and Phoebe will undoubtedly be beneficial for him as well.

"I'm going to get something to drink, mom. Would you like something?"

When Icheb calls her mom, Kathryn's eyes fill with tears that she quickly tries to blink back.

"No sweetheart. Mom? Phoebe?"

"Water. I'm parched."

"Okay, grandma."

"I'd like a coffee." Phoebe adds.

"Yes, thorn."

As Icheb walks off, everyone else laughs at Icheb's jab.

"She's definitely mother material." Tom says to B'Elanna, Chakotay, and Harry.

"I'm glad Icheb has her. His first try with a mother didn't end well." Harry adds.

"At least now he knows his mother would die for him before seeing him get hurt."

"Did you guys see her face when he called her mom? I don't think I've ever seen anything like it." Tom says still astonished.

"That's saying something considering how long you two have known each other. But it was something. I don't think there was a dry eye in here. She deserves happiness." B'Elanna's emotions have been strong since giving birth, and her elation has made her want everyone to find happiness.

"I was really shocked when I saw that Icheb was walking with her. I didn't know about the 'mom' thing." Harry's confusion makes the others laugh.

"She's legally adopting him. She loves him like a son, and she wants him to know it isn't transient. She wants him to know he isn't alone." Chakotay adds for the benefit of those around him.

"Wow. Though, I can't imagine anyone who knows her believing that she could stop loving. I've never known her to be like that before."

Tom, of the group, has the longest knowledge of Janeway. His belief that she can't stop loving spans almost his whole lifetime of memories and experiences with her.

"Hello, Tom."

The new voice is distinguished and similar to their Captain's, but it is softer and gentler than the voice the crew have grown to love.

"Gretchen!" Tom hugs Gretchen like one would hug their own mother.

"I heard there is a beautiful bundle I need to meet. I'd like to be introduced before you beg me to babysit."

"Of course." Taking Miral from B'Elanna's arms, Tom places her lovingly in Gretchen's embrace.

"Hello, beautiful girl. I'm Grandma Gretchen. I'll teach you all about math and show you how to make caramel brownies when you're

older. But now I'm just going to hold you."

Gretchen's sweetness had been seen often throughout Voyager's seven year journey through her daughter.

"The Captain's a lot like you Mrs. Janeway." Harry says the words, but everyone gathered has been thinking them.

"Yes. She is. In the good and bad ways."

"Are you obsessed with coffee, too?"

Chakotay's ease with Kathryn has carried over to Gretchen.

"If you're asking if I consider coffee a food group, the answer is yes." Gretchen looks over Chakotay before adding, "Very dark and very strong."

Both remarks are so like Kathryn. The gathered crew laugh wholeheartedly first at her coffee remark then at her blatant innuendo.

"Mother, are you causing trouble already." Kathryn walks up being trailed by Phoebe and Icheb who are exuberantly conversing a few steps behind her.

"Of course dear."

"At least you have your hands full of baby. How much trouble can you really get into?"

"Would you like to find out?"

"As tempting as that is, I don't think Starfleet can handle it. Besides, can you imagine the press coverage you would get? I can see the headline now: 'The Intrepid Captain bails mother out of jail day of return."

"Starfleet wouldn't dare arrest me. I have known most of these Admirals going on 50 years."

"And half of them would love to see you in the brig."

"And the other half?"

"Would like nothing more than never to see you again, mother. You're nothing but trouble."

The banter between their staid Captain and her Paris-esque mother has gained a lot of attention. By this point most of the crew are listening and laughing along.

"I'm nothing but fun, Kathryn. And I know quite a few Admirals whose fantasies include neither brig time nor my disappearance."

"Care to elaborate."

"I don't know if your fair Irish skin could take it. You might turn completely red, and then what would we do with you?"

"Nothing. My face would match my uniform. Quite stunningly I imagine."

"Stunningly. There's a word that I think would be in some fantasies. Stunning. What do you think these bachelor Admirals fantasize about your stunning and rather single mother?"

"Your brownies."

"I bet most of them do think about dessert. Though, probably more about breakfast."

Seeing Kathryn's face turn as red as a Christmas light, Gretchen hands Miral back to Tom, chuckles, and walks through the parting the gathered crowd has made.

"You lost that one, Katie."

"You two have seven years on me. Give me a little practice. Mom won't know what hit her."

The crew is stunned by their Captain's seeming disregard for the scene her mother just created. In fact, the laugh lines around her eyes and the smile on her face show how much she enjoyed what just happened.

"Mom, I don't think you're ready for Grandma. Tom maybe. His tastes are less refined." Icheb's humor, when used, is quite a bit like the Janeway clan's wit.

"Well sweetheart, Captain Proton hasn't been much challenge over the last seven years."

"You are the Queen, Arachnia."

"That, Tom, should never be brought up."

"Why? I still have your costume. Maybe I'll auction it off to the highest bidder. I bet someone would pay a lot of latinum to have something you wore. Especially since it was used to save Voyager."

"B'Elanna, chain up your dog."

"Only his feet Captain. I still need him to hold Miral."

"Officer level thinking."

"I learned from the best."

The smiles around the room show gratitude and togetherness. The only face not sharing the happiness is Chakotay's. His whole world is being uprooted. Everything he has come to rely on is being taken away from him.

"I hate to leave so early, but I have a niece and nephew to meet in Indiana. Tom, why don't you organize a get together in two weeks' time for a New Year's celebration? That way, we can get reacquainted with our Alpha Quadrant families during Christmas but see our Voyager family before the year is over."

"Of course, Captain."

"Just Kathryn, and pass that along. I'm not your Captain anymore, and I'd like to start hearing my name again. Also pass along a message. If anyone doesn't have someone to spend Christmas with, they are more than welcome in Indiana. We have more than enough room, and no one should be alone on Christmas."

"Of course, Kathryn. Have fun with your family."

"And you with yours."

Over the next half hour, the crew heads home with family or friends. The only one left with nowhere to go is Chakotay. His sister won't be able to be here for almost two weeks, and his cousin is in the Gamma Quadrant.

He decides to take Starfleet up on their offer to house any and all crew who need it. He is the only one. Even the Doctor went with Lieutenant Barclay. Last week, he probably would've stayed with Seven or Kathryn, but not now.

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The week until Christmas passes slowly for Chakotay. He exercises, catches up on Alpha Quadrant news, and thinks. There is nothing more for him to do.

On Christmas Eve, Chakotay decides he is going to Kathryn's for Christmas. She did invite anyone who might be alone on Christmas, and he has never felt more alone than he does right now. 'The worst that can happen is she turns me away.' Chakotay thinks.

With his mind made up, he sets about preparing gifts for Kathryn and her family.

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The morning arrives and Chakotay showers quickly. His brown suit and cream shirt are crisp and complement his skin and eyes.

After dressing, he gathers his gifts and heads to the transport.

The Bloomington station is only a couple minutes from the Janeway home, but Indiana is cold at Christmas time. By the time he reaches the front door, he is completely frozen through.

After ringing the chime, he places the presents on the ground and begins rubbing his hands together.

"Commander Chakotay."

"Hello, Mrs. Janeway."

"Come in. You must be freezing."

Kathryn told Gretchen that some of her crew might be coming for Christmas. Anyone without family, or if they just wanted to be there, was welcome.

"We are about to sit down for Christmas breakfast."

"Where do I put these?"

Until this point, Gretchen hadn't noticed the gifts.

"You didn't have to do that Chakotay, but right through those doors. The tree's in the corner. You can't miss it."

After depositing his sack beneath the tree, Chakotay is led by Gretchen into the kitchen.

"We eat breakfast at the kitchen table and dinner in the dining room."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"If you could start moving some things to the table, that'd be wonderful."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Gretchen, please. And never ma'am. Not even when it's crunch time."

"Yes, Gretchen."

By the time Gretchen and Chakotay finish their preparations, the family starts finding their way to the kitchen in ones and twos. Including Chakotay, there are eight people for breakfast: Gretchen, Kathryn, Icheb, Phoebe and her husband, Art, their children, Katie and Thomas, and Chakotay.

The last one to make it to the table is Kathryn. She sees Chakotay and says nothing. Not even a perfunctory 'hello.'

"This looks delicious mother. You can't imagine how many times I've dreamed about Christmas breakfast over the years."

"It looks wonderful, grandma."

Icheb's admittance into the family seems so natural to all gathered. Katie and Thomas are excited to have a cousin, and Gretchen is happy to have another grandchild.

"It tastes even better if you two would start using your mouths for eating instead of talking."

With quick laughs all around, everyone digs in.

The breakfast lasts until Katie and Thomas can't hold in their excitement anymore. Their demands for presents are too much for their doting grandmother. She puts an end to breakfast and ushers everyone into the living room.

Presents consist mostly of toys for the two youngest as well as a spattering of Earth related items for Icheb. Kathryn presents her mother and sister with seven years' worth of mementos from the Delta Quadrant.

Her present for Icheb is the last present he opens and definitely the best.

"Here, Icheb."

At first glance, Icheb finds a padd.

"Turn it on."

Since Icheb was saved by the Borg, neither Kathryn nor Chakotay have ever seen him cry until today.

With no response he drops the padd onto Gretchen's lap and pulls Kathryn into a never ending hug.

Gretchen's face changes when she looks at the screen. Her eyes fill with tears, and she puts her hand over her mouth.

"Thank you, mom. I love you so much."

"I love you, too, Icheb."

"What did you get him, Katie?" Phoebe can't wait any longer.

Instead of Kathryn answering, Gretchen hands Phoebe the padd.

"Oh." A light misting of tears fill her eyes. "Oh, this is wonderful, Kathryn."

"What is it mommy?"

"Aunt Kathryn gave Icheb a wonderful present. She gave him a family."

"He's a Janeway now." Art says looking over Phoebe's shoulder.

"You adopted him?"

For the first time since he arrived, Kathryn talks to Chakotay.

"I told you I was going to. He's mine, and I'm his."

"That's what you were doing off the ship."

"It took all afternoon. I stayed in San Francisco overnight because I had a lot on my mind."

"I'll be the next Cadet Janeway."

"I hadn't even thought about that, but you're right. You're happy with this, Icheb."

"More than. These last few months, you have felt like my mother. More than my mother considering what my real mother was capable of. When we made it home, I didn't know where I'd go, and I was afraid I'd lose you. I'm proud to be a Janeway."

The depth of their love for each other surprised Chakotay. He never knew they were this close.

The looks around the room encourage more details, so Kathryn fills in the blanks.

"When we picked up Icheb there were other Borg children with him. Along the way, we returned them all to their homes. When we returned Icheb, we found out that his parents had purposely sent him to the Borg. He was meant to infect the collective. No sooner had we dropped him off they were sending him back out. We rescued him, and he has been with us ever since."

"Since we rescued them, they all became like children to me. Icheb especially. A couple months ago, he approached me about teaching him more about the Alpha Quadrant. The stuff that isn't in text books. We've spent most of our time off together for the last two and a half months. Sometimes he would sleep on my couch if we stayed up late talking. With every passing day, I felt more protective over him, more motherly. He was so scared and lonely when we found him. From the beginning, I have only wanted to protect and love him."

Hearing things from Kathryn's point of view gives Icheb the time to organize his thoughts.

"She taught me about holidays and traditions, how to joke, and how to use my fears as fuel instead of fire. When I spent time with her, I found myself thinking of her as a mom. I never expected this, but I can't think of any gift I will ever receive that will mean more to me."

"Early in my journey, I hadn't spent as much time with her, but the last few months found me more alone and adrift. And my mom saved me like any loving mother would. In the beginning she gave me love and kindness. Now she has given me a family."

Chakotay can pinpoint almost to the day when Icheb felt adrift. Probably very near the time he started spending most of his off duty time with Seven.

"I'm glad to call you my grandson, Icheb. You're not nearly as much trouble as your mother."

"Not yet, but she still has a lot to teach me."

"You did teach him how to joke, Katie."

Phoebe's joy over her sister's happiness seems more subdued than the others. She keeps catching Kathryn's eye, and doesn't like what she sees.

"Was that the last present?"

"No, Thomas. Chakotay brought some this morning."

Chakotay retrieves his bag before handing out the gifts. He gives wooden carvings to Gretchen and Phoebe. Gretchen's depicts two birds connected in flight. Phoebe's is a family of turtles sitting on a log. Katie and Thomas both receive traditional toys he played with as a child on Trebus. To Art he gives a model of Voyager. He didn't know what to give the man he had never met, but he was betting on the fact that Art would like to brag that he knows the famous Captain. The

look on his face shows his pleasure. He gives Icheb a padd confirming three days and nights in Mexico so he can swim at the beach and explore Earth.

Finally he hands Kathryn her gift.

"Here, Kathryn."

She opens the package to find an elegant silver pocket watch.

"Nineteenth century, mechanical movement. It's a replica of the chronometer worn by Captain Cray of the British Navy. His ship was hit by a typhoon in the Pacific. Everyone back in England thought they were killed, but eight months later Cray sailed his ship into London harbor. There wasn't much left of it, a few planks, half a sail, but he got his crew home."

"Thank you, Chakotay. It's beautiful."

The words are right, but none of the emotion he expected is there.

"You're welcome. You deserve it."

"Yes. Well, I'm glad you gave me what I deserve."

Chakotay senses panic setting in. The words and the look in her eyes scare him more than he has ever been scared before. Kathryn honestly believes she is deserving of what Chakotay said to her in her quarters. Tom was right to be worried, and based on Phoebe's face, she has finally figured out what hasn't been adding up.

"How about we all put away our presents then drink some hot chocolate. Hmm?"

Gretchen's question is met with enthusiasm.

"I have never had hot chocolate. Whenever mom told me about it, she told me the replicators wouldn't do it justice. I'd just have to wait until I was home to try it."

"Your mom was right. My hot chocolate is better than any replicator could provide. Now, as they say in temporal mechanics, no time like the present."

Everyone began filing back towards the kitchen to get settled except Phoebe and Chakotay. Chakotay had made to move, but Phoebe grabbed his arm.

"Explain, now."

"Explain what?"

"Explain why my sister, who should be ecstatic about making it home, about having a loving son, can barely even pretend to be happy. The only real joy I've seen since her return is when she's dealing with Icheb. Other than that, it's Stonewall Janeway."

Chakotay wants to respond, but his pride won't allow it.

"I'll tell you what I think." Phoebe says after too much silence. "I think she loved you. She probably loved you more than you've ever been loved, but she was scared. You wouldn't know why she was scared because she wouldn't tell you. So at some point, most likely recently, you inadvertently destroyed her. Am I close?"

Chakotay merely nods.

"How could you do that to her? Have you seen her? There's nothing there. It's just a blank wall. If she didn't have *Icheb* I don't even want to think about that. You have to fix this."

"I don't think I can."

"Why not?"

"I said things to her that don't deserve forgiveness. Tom told me about Justin. I had no idea. Afterward, I replayed what I said. I hurt her. I made that Kathryn." Chakotay finishes pointing in the general direction of the kitchen.

"In her letters, she spoke well of you. I didn't think you'd be a coward." Chakotay glances up sharply prepared to cut in, but Phoebe doesn't give him the chance. "You'd be willing to let Kathryn continue like she is right now all because you don't want to have to be reminded of what you did."

"What I did? You can't put everything on me. Kathryn did more than enough to destroy herself. I can't be held responsible for hurting her when I didn't even know about something so defining."

"Can you not imagine where she comes from? You lost your family to the Cardassians. Can you imagine if you had been there to witness the destruction? Or better yet, if you had been given the choice to save some but not all. Then the Cardassians decide you took too long and kill them all. Right in front of you. She won't talk about it. If she did, I think it might kill her."

"But I wanted her to love me, Phoebe. I love her. I have for seven years."

"I can tell you as her sister, she loves you, but I don't know if anything will come of it now. Every single time she has loved a man, they have been taken from her. She has never been scared of anything, but this. Her heart is fragile. She protected herself. If she hadn't, and you would've died, it wouldn't have taken her long to follow you. I don't know exactly what happened between you two, but I can tell you that she didn't protect her heart as well as she thought she had. You broke her."

Chakotay has never considered himself a coward, but yet again he grabs his things and flees the room. Standing right outside the door is Kathryn. Her body is breathing, but her eyes are completely dead.

Chakotay quickly says his goodbyes before making his exit.

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Four days after Christmas, Sekaya arrives in San Francisco. For two days, Chakotay forgets about his Kathryn problems during the day. He spends his time learning about who his sister has become and sharing his experiences.

The nights are filled with anguish and regret. Seeing Kathryn's eye's devoid of all warmth was a punch in the gut. His breath was ripped from his body, and he is still having problems accepting it.

Tonight is the first Voyager get together in two weeks. Tom set it all up, and unsurprisingly, they are to meet at the real Sandrine's.

"Brother, we need to leave now."

"I'm ready. Let's go."

When they walk in, the room is full of crewmembers and their families who applaud when they see who it is.

Chakotay blushes before walking the rest of the way in the room.

"Shocking, one of the last to arrive."

"Who else hasn't made it, B'E?"

"Just Kathryn and Icheb. She commed me yesterday telling me they would probably be late arriving."

"Did she say why?"

"She just said it was a surprise."

"The surprise should be revealed soon then." Tom said as he pointed towards the doors.

The applause starts slow and continues until every crewmember is on their feet. Their families join in the thanks knowing how pivotal Kathryn was to the successful return of their loved ones.

"That's enough. Save some applause for when I wipe the table with Tom at pool."

The laughter spreads around the room as they all remember the first time they saw Kathryn play.

"What's this I hear about a surprise, Kathryn?" B'Elanna yells from across the room.

With her announcement, everyone turns back to the front door.

"Icheb?"

Icheb removes his jacket to show his Starfleet Cadet shirt.

The congratulations are loud until over it all, the ever perceptive Tom notices the real surprise.

"Cadet Janeway?"

Kathryn slips her arms around Icheb's waist in a motherly hold.

"The paperwork is through. Icheb's a Janeway."

The happiness in the room pervades every surface and carries throughout the night.

Near the end of the night, Chakotay finally has the courage to approach Kathryn.

"Kathryn." Upon seeing who spoke, Kathryn turns to leave. "Please don't go. I'd really like to talk to you and explain some things. Please?"

"Not here." Again Kathryn turns to leave.

"Are you free tomorrow? I can come to Indiana. Sekaya has to do some business, so it's just me."

"I'll meet you in San Francisco. If I have to leave, I'd rather not be forced to leave my own home again."

Chakotay wants to comment on her dig, but he knows he deserves it.

"Lunch at 12:00? I'm in Starfleet housing number 439."

"Fine. Bye."

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At precisely 12:00 Chakotay's chime rings.

"Come. You're right on time. I made vegetarian lasagna, a fresh salad with Delta Quadrant vegetables, and tiramisu for dessert."

On New Earth, this had been Kathryn's favorite meal.

Lunch is a silent affair. Kathryn isn't inclined to speak, and Chakotay feels like his topic is too serious to discuss over a meal.

After they are both sipping their post meal coffees, Kathryn broaches the subject.

"Why am I here, Chakotay?"

"I want to apologize for everything I said in your quarters."

"Why? You were right."

"No, I wasn't. I couldn't have been more wrong, actually. I was cruel and mean. I was just saying things designed to hurt you."

"Why would you do that?"

"Because I was mad. I was mad that you wouldn't give me your blessing, but mostly I was mad that I had loved you for seven years."

And besides are brief stay on New Earth, I got nothing. I thought you were being vindictive and biting. When I said you were jealous, I thought I was right. And that you didn't want to see me happy."

"I was jealous. Of Seven. I finally had another opportunity where I wouldn't be your superior. I wouldn't be responsible for making a decision that might kill you. I finally get where I pushed for so long to be to find I'm all alone."

"Kathryn."

"I'm assuming you're apologizing because someone told you things I have never told you. Who was it? Tom or Phoebe? It doesn't matter. You're right. I don't know how to love. I can't. I love so fully that it isn't safe. My heartbreak has the power to destroy me."

"That's how I love you."

"No you don't Chakotay. If you loved me like I love you, you wouldn't have been able to say those things to me. I would rather die than knowingly hurt you."

"I want to die, Kathryn. For weeks, my mind has been filled with images of your face from right before you left your quarters. The knowledge that I took something so vital away is destroying me. It took me this long to talk to you because I'm a coward."

"I'm sorry Chakotay, but I can't put myself out there again. You were my third strike."

"No. I can't accept that. I love you, and you love me. And it's killing us both that we aren't together."

"It is killing me, but I'll get over it. I have my family to care for me."

"I don't, and if you walk out that door today, you will never see me again."

"It's not really fair to be giving ultimatums when you're the one who brought us to this point. I believed you when you told me always. I even believed you when you weren't beside me on the bridge. I believed you right up to the point where you assaulted me in my quarters."

"It's not an ultimatum, Kathryn. I love you too much to watch you move on from me. If not being with me makes you happy, there's nothing I can do to make you stay. Nor would I want to if I could. I want to see you happy, but I can't stay if you cut me out."

"For 20 years, I have thought fate couldn't get crueler. I watched two men I loved dearly die right before my eyes. All I had left was Starfleet, and they wanted to give me the boot because I was so dead inside. Phoebe finally had enough and forced me to get better."

"After years alone, I rekindle a friendship with a man I have known since I was a child. It wasn't like the love I had with Justin, but I felt safe. Six weeks before we are set to get married, I get pulled a lifetime away with no way to tell him I'm even alive."

"For the next seven years, I fall in love with a man. Deeply. A man I believe to be my soulmate, but I can't say anything. I can't verbalize anything in case one of my decisions kills him. So for seven years, he's my goal. I just have to get back to Earthâ€ then I can love him. Only he's not there. And when he does come to be by my side, it's only to tear me into shreds and tell me he can't believe he could ever love a woman like me."

"I loved you with everything that I am. I gave you my heart, and I watched you squeeze the life out of it."

Chakotay sees the anguish, but mostly he sees the fear. He knows he hurt Kathryn, but she is a forgiving person. His biggest problem is going to be getting her to overcome her fear.

"I can't promise I'll never die, and I can't promise I won't ever hurt you again. But I can promise that I will always love you. I loved you within 30 seconds of meeting you, and I love you today."

"I love you, Chakotay. But I can't â€."

"Don't say you can't. You can. The only thing stopping you is fear. You have to decide right now if you are more in love with me or more scared of what I represent."

Kathryn sits still analyzing everything that has been said. Her heart belongs to Chakotay. If he leaves, it will destroy her. Not even Icheb will be able to save her if that happens. She also analyzes the fear. If Chakotay were to die or decide he didn't love her anymore, it would also destroy her.

"If I give you my heart, you could leave or die. But if I don't you will leave, and it would kill me."

"What are you saying, Kathryn?"

"I love you, Chakotay. No matter how much I have tried to protect my heart from you, it hasn't worked. I can't imagine a day without you."

Chakotay timidly stands up before making his way to Kathryn's side of the table. Crouching down beside her, he takes her face in both of his hands and kisses her sweetly.

"Thank you. I honestly thought that would be a lot harder."

"There are only certain things about love that I enjoy being hard, that wasn't one of them."

Chakotay's dimpled smile turns into a leer as he picks Kathryn up and walks her to his room.

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The next three days are spent mostly by themselves. They spend some time in Indiana with Kathryn's family and some time in Ohio with Chakotay's.

On the fourth day, the senior staff, Gretchen, Phoebe and her family, Icheb, Miral, Sekaya, T'Pel, and Owen and Elizabeth Paris are having lunch at Gretchen's house.

"Admiral, may I ask a favor?"

"Of course Chakotay. You can ask."

"Would you mind marrying me and Kathryn?"

Kathryn's head whips around to stare at Chakotay.

"When would you want the service?"

"Right now."

"Katie?"

"Yes, Owen."

"How do you feel about it?"

"I think it's a great idea. I don't have the best track record with fiancÃ©'s."

Gretchen, Phoebe, Owen, Elizabeth and Tom trade glances. This is the first time in 20 years any of them have ever heard a joke slightly related to Justin.

"Then by all means."

The ceremony is a simple affair. Kathryn and Chakotay are surrounded by the people they care about the most. The love in their eyes is intense and binding.

As they trade rings and kiss, those gathered are taken away by the love that was suppressed for so long.

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Epilogue:

On the first anniversary of Voyager's return, Starfleet has coordinated a huge event. Voyager's crew and their families have all been invited to gather at Starfleet's Cochrane Ballroom.

"Chakotay hurry, or we're going to be late. Everyone else is waiting in the lobby for us."

"Sorry, it took me four attempts to get my bow tie on straight."

"I can't even see my shoes, but you don't see me running late."

Putting his hand on the bump that will soon be his son and daughter, Chakotay smiles. Six months ago, Kathryn had shocked him half to death when she came home from her physical and told him she was six weeks pregnant with twins.

Chakotay and Kathryn beam to the lobby of Cochrane Ballroom.

"It took you two long enough."

"There's four of us mom. This planet at my center isn't just for looks you know."

"Mom, dad, we've been waiting for you."

"Sorry, Icheb. It was all your mother."

The glare Kathryn sends Chakotay's way is set on kill."

"Kathryn. Chakotay. They are waiting to introduce you."

This is from Admiral James Pontifer. After years of being alone, Gretchen finally allowed James to snag her. Chakotay thinks back to the time when Gretchen said that Kathryn was like her in ways 'both good and bad.'

It took Kathryn allowing Chakotay in for Gretchen to finally let Edward go. For the last eight months, James and Gretchen have been nearly inseparable. Gretchen has known James for half a century, but only now has allowed him to love her like more than a friend.

The rest of the family is together and happier than they were a year before. Icheb and Chakotay behave like father and son, and Icheb is very excited about the prospect of younger siblings.

The Voyager family has prospered in the Alpha Quadrant, and they are all awaiting the Captain and Commander's new crewmembers.

Kathryn has finally come to terms with her father and Justin dying. She has realized that it truly is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

She's just hoping the third time is the charm.

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file.